

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8417

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 2245

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MO SS

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE MILITARY ATTACHE TRAVEL TO SAHARA

1. SUMMARY. AN OBJECT WE BELIEVE TO BE US NAVY EXERCISE TORPEDO HAS WASHED ASHORE AND IS IN MOROCCAN HANDS IN EL AYOUN. WE MAY BE ASKED BY MOROCCAN MILITARY AUTHORITIES TO SEND SOMEONE FROM MILITARY ATTACHE'S OFFICE THERE TO EXAMINE THE ITEM, IN WHICH CASE WE PLAN TO RESPOND POSITIVELY, UNLESS OTHERWISE DIRECTED. END SUMMARY.

2. DAO LEARNED LAST WEEK THAT "METALLIC OBJECT" ABOUT EIGHTEEN FEET LONG HAD BEEN WASHED UP ON MOROCCAN BEACH. FOLLOWING INQUIRY TO MOROCCAN MILITARY LIAISON OFFICER, WE WERE INFORMED THAT SUCH AN OBJECT HAD IN FACT BEEN LOCATED NEAR EL AYOUN AND PRESENTLY BEING HELD BY MOROCCAN GENDARMERIE THERE.

3. WHEN INFORMED OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, US NAVY REPORTED THAT OBJECT MAY WELL BE AN EXERCISE MK-45 MOD 2 TORPEDO LOST IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS WEST OF ROTA IN LATE DECEMBER. NAVY HAS REQUESTED DAO ASSISTANCE IN IDENTIFYING AND RECOVERING THE TORPEDO.

4. WHILE WE ARE NOT CERTAIN THE OBJECT FOUND BY MOROCCANS IS IN FACT THE LOST TORPEDO, BASED ON IDENTIFICATION DATA PROVIDED BY MOROCCANS THIS APPEARS LIKELY. WE HAVE NOT SOUGHT PERMISSION FROM GOM TO IDENTIFY THE OBJECT, NOR HAVE MOROCCAN AUTHORITIES INDICATED WE WOULD BE PERMITTED TO EXAMINE IT.

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MOROCCANS, HOWEVER, ARE CONCERNED THAT THE OBJECT MIGHT

BE EXPLOSIVE AND WE EXPECT THEM, BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE, TO ASK US TO EXAMINE IT ON THE SPOT. WHILE OUR PREFERENCE WOULD, OF COURSE, BE TO VIEW IT IN MOROCCO, MOROCCAN CONCERN OVER ITS POSSIBLE EXPLOSIVE NATURE LIKELY TO PRECLUDE THEIR MOVING IT.

5. PLANNED ACTION: UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED, I PLAN TO HAVE MILITARY ATTACHE CONTACT MOROCCAN MILITARY LIAISON ON APRIL 30 TO EXPRESS OUR INTEREST IN VERIFYING WHETHER OBJECT IS IN FACT THE LOST NAVY EXERCISE TORPEDO. HE WOULD ALSO INQUIRE WHETHER GOM HAD ANY PLANS TO MOVE THE OBJECT HERE. IF ASKED BY GOM TO EXAMINE IT IN EL AYOUN, I WOULD PLAN TO HAVE A DAO REP TRAVEL THERE SOLELY FOR THAT PURPOSE. NO TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF IMMEDIATE EL AYOUN AREA WOULD BE CARRIED OUT.

6. AS NOTED STATE 85398, DEPARTMENT'S LEGAL BUREAU DOES NOT BELIEVE VISIT BY US AMBASSADOR TO EL AYOUN WOULD POSE LEGAL PROBLEM, AS SUCH VISIT WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE RECOGNITION OF MOROCCAN CLAIMS TO SOVEREIGNTY IN THE SAHARA. WE ASSUME THAT TECHNICAL VISIT BY DAO REPRESENTATIVE WOULD BE EVEN LESS LIKELY TO POSE LEGAL PROBLEM. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN NO VISITS SINCE FEBRUARY 28 BY FOREIGN EMBASSY PERSONNEL TO SAHARA THAT WE KNOW OF, WE DO NOT BELIEVE GOM WILL EXPLOIT VISIT BY DAO REP FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. THIS BELIEF REINFORCED BY FACT THAT GOM REFRAINED FROM EXPLOITING NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINE VISIT TO MOROCCAN PORT OF SAFI MARCH 20-23.

ANDERSON

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